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US Church Membership Highest in History

(New York) - Church membership in the United States now stands at a record-breaking 109,557,741 persons according to new statistics published in the 1960 Yearbook of American Churches.

The figure represents 63 per cent of the country's estimated population of 173,374,000 - the highest ratio of church membership in US history. It is a gain of 5,368,063 persons in 1958 or a rise of five per cent as compared to a population increase during the same period of 1.7 per cent.

Of the new total 61,504,669 are Protestants, 39,509,508 are Roman Catholics, 5,500,000 are Jews, and 2,545,318 are Eastern Orthodox. The total increase of Protestant bodies during the year was reported at 2.8 per cent.

The figures on Protestant membership, based on statistics filed by 224 churches, show the Methodist Church is the largest Protestant denomination with 9,670,690 members. Second is the Southern Baptist Convention with 9,202,205 and third is the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. (Negro) with 5,000,000 members.

Total figures are based on memberships reported by 251 church bodies in 49 states, including Alaska for the first time, and the District of Columbia. The Yearbook is published by the National Council of Churches. EPS, Geneva

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Cardinal Underscores Faith of Poles

(Czestochowa, Poland) - Stefan Cardinal Wyszynski, Primate of Poland, has denounced what he termed "certain circles" in Poland who have predicted that the Polish nation "would grow indifferent toward the faith and the people would gradually abandon their priests and churches".

The faith of the Polish people is "superbly strong" and any "attempts to undermine the Church" are doomed to failure, the Primate told an audience estimated at 100,000 persons making an annual pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa.

"Governments come and go", he stressed, "but the family and the Church remain."

Cardinal Wyszynski also warned against "undermining" attempts being made by the Polish National Catholic Church. This church, he said, "is not Christ's Church but that of the usurper". (The Polish National Catholic Church in Poland is a branch of the Polish National Catholic Church formed in 1904 in Scranton, Pa., and belongs to the Utrecht Union of Old Catholic Churches. The church, which does not recognize the Pope, has about 300,000 members in the US, Canada and Poland.)

EPS, Geneva

Three US Student Groups Merge

(Oberlin) - A National Student Christian Federation has been inaugurated in the USA at a service of dedication held in Oberlin, Ohio.

The ceremony, in which 250 clergy and student representatives of more than 40 Protestant groups participated, marked the formal recognition of the merger of three Protestant student organizations - the United Student Christian Council, the Student Volunteer Movement and the Interseminary Movement. All three groups were previously related individually to the National Council of Churches' Division of Christian Education, with which the Federation also now will be affiliated.

Dr. R.H. Edwin Espy, NCC associate general secretary, told a dinner held in connection with the inauguration that the student Christian movements in US universities and colleges "must grow from a sense of oneness in Christ, and from a determination that this oneness shall be made manifest and hence effective in the college and university world."

EPS, Geneva

Colombian Presbyterian Church Becomes Independent

(Bogota) - After 103 years of missionary work in Colombia, the United Presbyterian Church in the USA has turned over its equipment and institutions to the Colombian Presbyterian Church, with the assurance that it will continue to help the still small national church carry out its mission.

Official recognition of the independent status of the Colombian Church was given at a ceremony held recently in Bogota attended by representatives of both churches. The first act of the Colombian Church following the ceremony was the acceptance of the thirty-six former missionaries as fraternal workers and their assignment to various fields of work.

The Colombian Presbyterian Church was organized in 1937 as a Synod composed of three presbyteries. Besides its congregations located in six departments (Antioquia, Atlantico, Cordoba, Cundinamarca, Santander and Tolima), the Synod directs 23 primary schools and four high schools, a literacy programme, a youth organization and a community health programme.

EPS, Geneva



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Cuban Church Council Supports Castro

(Havana) - The Cuban Council of Evangelical Churches has gone on record "without reserve" in support of the government of Dr. Fidel Castro.

In a strongly worded statement released in Havana, the Council "categorically refuted" charges that the Castro government is "within the orbit of Communism" and endorsed Castro's efforts to "graft into the life of the (Cuban) nation the Christian principles of liberty, equality and the brotherhood of man."

The Council said it regretted any "temporary lack of understanding" among Americans of Castro's social and political goals. The Castro government has been under strong criticism in some US circles for its revolutionary "extremism".

In a similar statement issued recently eight leaders of seven Cuban Protestant Church organizations, defended the Castro government as a "true revolution". (See EPS No. 35)

EPS, Geneva

Khrushchev Visit to US Churches Urged

(Rochester) - A prominent Baptist leader has suggested that Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev be invited to attend Sunday church services during his visit to the United States.

Dr. Theodore F. Adams of Richmond, Va., president of the Baptist World Alliance, said that such a visit would show Mr. Khrushchev "what religion means to America and to Americans".

He said the Russian leader should also be given the opportunity to see other phases of American church life including Christian education, orphanages and hospitals.

"We want Mr. Khrushchev to sense the true strength and greatness of our country," he said. "Certainly one important source of that strength is our Christian faith and I trust that he will have an opportunity to sense that and to see what religion means to America and Americans."

The Baptist leader made his suggestions in a letter to President Eisenhower, made public at a recent Baptist World Alliance Executive Committee meeting in Rochester, New York.

EPS, Geneva

In Brief

The Vatican Radio has reported that a conference will be held at Venice next year between Orthodox and Roman Catholic theologians. It described the meeting as being on a wider and more representative basis than any that had occurred in the past, but underlined that while the Roman Catholic Church encouraged such contact it will not invest such encounters with its official consent.

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Churches near strikebound steel mills in Gary, Ind., USA, are remaining open around the clock to "encourage people to offer prayers for the solution of the deadlock". In addition two ministers are conducting services on the picket line, as a result of plans made last June by the Lake County Council of Churches to provide services if and when the strike was called.

EPS, Geneva

A Special Report

International Missionary Council Plans for Future

The International Missionary Council will coordinate new moves in theological education as a result of decisions taken at major meetings near Paris this summer.

The Council's Administrative Committee decided to launch a two-year programme of investigation and discussion on "new forms of ministry, including voluntary non-professional ministry" in areas where the younger churches are expanding fast.

The need for new experiments was underlined in discussions at the Administrative Committee's July meeting. Bishop J. Lesslie Newbigin of the Church of South India, the IMC's new general secretary, reported on the development of training programmes for laymen who serve as pastors and evangelists in India.

The international study of new patterns will culminate in a world meeting.

Intensified action to improve theological education in Asia, Africa and Latin America was announced after the July meeting of the IMC's Theological Education Fund, also held near Paris.

A directing group of 31 experts from areas including the Southwest Pacific met to hear reports of travel and survey by Fund director Dr. Charles Ranson and associate director Dr. Charles Forman. Detailed accounts were also given of plans to improve library and text-book facilities in key theological seminaries supported by the fund.

The textbook programme aims to make possible "the preparation and circulation of adequate but inexpensive textbooks in some twenty languages, with emphasis on the work of indigenous writers acting under the oversight of competent regional committees in each language area".

Grants made to theological institutions under the four-million dollar Fund's drive to raise the level of the ministry include \$110,000 provisionally allocated for a new institution at Yaounde, Cameroun, and \$75,000 toward relocation of Trinity Theological College, Ghana, to bring it into association with the University College of Ghana. The Yaounde project will be supported on a "more than dollar-for-dollar" basis by seven churches and missions. The subsidy for the Ghana move is a little over a third of the total needed. Local churches will provide the rest.

A sum of \$300,000 was voted for use in the next twelve months in providing library books and periodicals for some 220 seminaries, with grants varying from \$300 to \$2,500. These grants are seen as a first step in the implementation of the full textbook programme, for which a quarter of a million dollars has been set aside.

Other plans include faculty exchanges, travel for library advisers, the holding of workshops and area consultations to map out development of the growing programme of the Fund.

The IMC's Administrative Committee also decided to set up an International Projects Fund to sponsor "growing points in the Christian world mission". Items for possible inclusion in the experimental plan in addition to the survey of new

forms of ministry are expansion of existing ecumenical study centres in Asia and the Near East and strengthening of regional developments such as the East Asia Christian Conference and the emerging all-Africa Christian cooperative body.

The Working Committee of the Department of Missionary Studies, which is a joint enterprise of the IMC and the World Council of Churches, has developed a scheme for world-wide study of the mission of the Church in "this ecumenical age".

The investigation will begin with formulation of a basic statement by an individual writer on the new way of seeing the Church's task. This statement will be criticised and tested at a number of regional conferences held at points where mission boards and churches are working together.

The IMC Administrative Committee heard evidence of "overwhelming support" for the proposed integration with the World Council of Churches in late 1961. Opposition from constituent national councils in Norway, Belgium and Brazil was reviewed. Agreement was later reached in the Joint Committee of the IMC and WCC on proposals for the constitution of the unified world body. Churches in the WCC and councils in the IMC will be asked to comment on the proposals within a year.

The new chairman of the IMC, Dr. Christian Baeta of the University College of Ghana, took over during the summer. Dr. Baeta, who has been teaching for a year at Union Theological Seminary in New York, has been a vice-chairman of the IMC. He has now returned to his Ghana post. EPS, Geneva

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